Religion (dupl.)

2121 Kammerer Avenue
San Jose 27, Calif.
Aug. 21, 1956

Most Rev. John J. Mitty
445 Church St.
San Francisco, Calif.

Your Excellency:

Thank you very much for sending the letters from Archbishop Lucey and from Monsignor Tardini of the Secretariat of State in regard to the need of Catholic Action to counteract Protestant activity among Catholic migrant field workers. In his letter Monsignor Tardini has made a request to be kept informed of the Catholic activities in the various dioceses for the Mexican migratory workers. The report of the Missionary Apostolate has already been submitted and is in the files of the Chancery Office; however, a special meeting was held of the priests assigned to the Missionary Apostolate of the Archdiocese of San Francisco to call their attention to these letters and to discuss the problems outlined therin. At this meeting the following observations were made which might be of interest.

First, there are two kinds of Protestant activity directed to the Catholic migratory workers; first, the social and recreational programs held for the migratory families of the southwest and, secondly, the rabid anti-Catholic preaching to the "braceros" (Mexican Nationals under contract). The first is an expression of love for people inspired by the compassion of the stable Protestant churches for the migratory families who are not visited and cared for by those of their own faith. The second is inspired directly by hate for the Catholic Church on the part of the fanatical Holy Roller sects.

Second, in the areas where there is the mass-importation of Mexican Nationals the Mexican-American family migratory workers are displaced.

Third, in regard to the effect on the Catholic people who are the recipients of these Protestant efforts, we note that if a priest or apostolic lay people sent by the priest do not visit the camps, there is a definite weakening of their feeling for the Catholic Church and the conversion of some to Protestantism. If, on the other hand, the priest and his lay people visit the migratory camps, the workers feel that their faith is vindicated and resist proselytism. Here we would like to observed that the most effective means of holding the Catholic migratory workers to their faith is for the priest to say a week-day evening mass right in the camp itself. This mass is generally preceded by the rosary with the detailed explanation illustrated by catechetical pictures of mysteries selected to give the coverage of the life of Christ from the Incarnation to the founding of His Church. Doctrinal hymns after each mystery prepare for confessions, which are heard after the rosary. This direct approach to the camp itself is the most simple and most effective contact we have found. We urge that priests in the parish be encouraged to say one of their week-day masses in the camps within their parishes at least once during a camp season. Even if services are available for migrants on Sunday at the parish church, nothing has the effect of an occasional week-day mass in the camp itself in counteracting Protestant proselytism and in preserving their loyalty to the Catholic faith.

However, the inescapable conclusion to which we are driven by our experience since 1950 in the camps of the field labor ganga of the men from Mexico is that the way of life itself undermines, weakens, and destroys morality. No matter how often the priest comes to the camps, the moral decay of the men becomes progressively worse. This conclusion is corroborated by the priests in Mexico, who see the change in their men when they return home. The seventh regional conference of the Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking held in Corpus Christi, Texas, on April 19, 1955, under the title "Our Catholic Migrants" issued a report by Father Rodolfo Excamilla of the Social Action Office of the Mexican Hierarchy in Mexico City which stated: "The most outstanding evils resulting from the importation of the Mexican men into the United States were first, the weakening of their faith, second, the abandoning of the cultivation of their land, and third, the moral and material neglect of their families" It is, therefore, the opinion of the priests of the Missionary Apostolate that Protestant proselytism is a side issue to the main problem of the moral decay of men isolated from their families, and that certain farm interest and public officials are most happy to see the attention of the Church focus upon Protestant activity among Catholic people because then the Church does not protest against the system itself. The Church is in a key position in this whole system involving the spiritual welfare of these Catholic men. We feel that the main effort of the Church should be directed to insisting in the human dignity of the men who labor in the fields of American and on the preservation of their right to have a family way of life. The booklet "The Legend of Pancho Sanchez" distributed by the Catholic Labor Alliance of Chicago, 21 West Superior St., Chicago 10, Illinois, illustrates the social and moral problem caused by the present farm labor system based on the importation of foreign labor gangs of men. We agree with the presentation of the problems there expressed.

The report of the Missionary Apostolate for this current 1956 season will be sent in when the work for this year has been completed. Thank you again for sending the latters, which we are returning to you as you requested.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Father McDonnell